remember me love when I'm reborn, as a shrike to your sharp and glorious thorn

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by imadetheline

Summary

He knows.

One moment it was the Chesapeake Ripper in his head. Some interminable amount of time later… it was Hannibal. They had become interchangeable.

Or: Will figures out Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper sometime in season 1 and has a hard time processing the information.

Notes

This is just a little idea I had and then had to write. Work title taken from Shrike by Hozier. It's a perfect song for these two and I highly recommend that you guys give it a listen. Anyways, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

had no idea on what ground I was founded, all of that goodness is gone with you now

He knows.

The lies painted in blood are washing away in the storm raging in his mind.

The worst of it is that it wasn't big. It wasn't momentous. There wasn't a moment when he just knew. He hadn't suddenly figured it out. No.

One moment it was the Chesapeake Ripper in his head. Some interminable amount of time later… it was Hannibal. They had become interchangeable. He hadn't even realized they'd blended in his head until he was talking and directing their current case away from the glaring signs of the copycat killer flashing in front of his eyes that no one else could see. The Ripper had once again provided a negative so Will could see the positive. He was helpful like that. He'd rushed out of the morgue after that thought, making excuses to Jack about not feeling well so he could leave early. The claims of nausea weren't entirely false.

Now he's sitting on the steps of his porch, whiskey in hand. It's taken hours to process. Memories and dreams twining together to form a figure of truth dancing through the mist that seems to live in his head. The horrible truth accosting his head in the form of throbbing pain. The truth that he's always known. He had known and done nothing. He still doesn't want to do anything.

He blinks.

That thought is banished to the recesses of his mind, with a hastily constructed fort built around it. The fog doesn't clear, but it returns to its normal position of floating around the edges of his mind, at the corners of his eyes. He tries to chase away the damning knowledge with another sip of whiskey. It burns a line of fire as it sinks into his stomach. His fingers twitch where they rest in his lap as he sets the glass near his foot.

The whiskey sits heavy in his stomach. He's reminded that he hasn't eaten today.

And then he's sitting in a lavish dining room, a deer laid out before him. And the Chesapeake Ripper- No, Hannibal, is sitting across from him, grinning. Will looks down. The deer looks back, blood sluggishly running from a slash in its neck. There's music playing somewhere. And then it's Jack, Alana… Abigail. And she's reaching for him and he's scrambling backwards and Hannibal- No, the Chesapeake Ripper is there and he's still grinning and there's something glinting in his palm-

And he's pulled from his mind by a rolling wave of nausea. He scrambles off the step, his foot knocking the whiskey glass over, where it shatters on the step below and spills out into the grass. He barely notices as he heaves his insides into the bushes, his stomach cramping as only whiskey and bile come up, though he expects something else… something more. He doesn't think about why.

When his stomach finally ceases its assault on the rest of his body and he's able to breathe, he straightens, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. His fingers tremble as he lowers them back to his side.

He breathes in.

His whole body is shaking as he tries to take a step towards the house and has to pause to breathe. His breaths come in shaky gasps as his lungs try to process his brain's command to breathe. His mind dances around memories of eating at Hannibal's table, never stopping long enough to reach the unwanted conclusion that is slowly surfacing from black water so matter how hard he tries to push it back into the depths. The rhythmic pulsing behind his temples is helping him forget, at least for the moment.

He breathes out.

His hands are the last to stop vibrating, still wracked by occasional tremors. As his mind sinks back into his body, he becomes aware of the cold. It's sunk into his bones, through his jacket, without his knowledge, biting and fierce and uncaring of its intrusion. He doesn't care to compare it to anyone, though maybe he should.

With his body finally still, he glances at the sky. He's not surprised by the darkening clouds gathering in the twilight. His mouth twitches towards something akin to a smile. It seems apt that the sky should at least attempt to mirror his thoughts. Though it's a poor reflection, he muses as he turns and begins to gather up the scattered pieces of the whiskey glass on the steps and in the grass: for if the world were truly trying to match his thoughts it would be aflame.

He climbs the steps, glass in one hand as his other reaches towards the door. He glances back at the small puddle of vomit.

It's tainted red, turned to blood as he stares.

His hand clenches, shards biting into flesh and he curses, bloody glass raining down from his torn palm and fingers. He looks back to the puddle but there's no blood, no red. He sighs, bringing his hand up to suck away the blood from a particularly deep cut to his fingertip. His hand is halfway to his mouth before he realizes what he's doing. He stops, his hand hovering in front of him. He can't think about blood in his mouth, in his lungs, in his stomach. He just stares at the offending appendage, disgusted and fascinated as the blood beads then slides down his finger to join the rest of the blood dripping from his palm and staining the world a deep crimson. He thinks he's seen enough of blood for a lifetime, though he can't explain why his gaze lingers on the bloody shards painting the porch, even as he reaches for the door again.

He tears his gaze from the bloody mess, leaving the glass where it is, another problem for the future. Instead, he turns and enters the house, cradling his injured hand and ignoring the howls and barks of his pack as they scamper around him. The door falls closed behind him with a bang. He flinches.

He searches through the cabinets for his first aid kit. It's not heavily stocked, but there's enough. He cleans and bandages his hand over the sink in the bathroom with unusually steady hands. The blood runs down the drain in red-tinted water. It's almost reassuring. He glances at his reflection in the mirror. He can feel the cold sweat where his curls are matted to his forehead and the darkness under his eyes is fooling no one, least of all himself. He knows of the glances from Jack, from Alana, but never from Hannibal.

Hannibal.

He shivers. The chill under his skin has yet to release him. Though it's better than the fire in his head. It's dimmed to embers as he mindlessly wraps a bandage around his hand. Strange that the thought of Hannibal lessens the pressure of the fire on his skull.

Somehow, his thoughts always return to Hannibal. He's caught in the man's web and he can't cut himself loose. He tries, and he tries, and he tries to forget, to ignore. But does he really try?

He splashes his face with water from his cupped hand. It's cold and startling and it chases away some of the fog still clouding around his face, clinging to his limbs with ghostly fingers, scrabbling for purchase at the gates of his mind.

Hannibal will have heard about his early departure from work. In the middle of an unsolved case, no less.

The thought catches on a stray spark floating through the ruins of his consciousness. Soon his world will be aflame again in grief and realizations he cannot avoid a second time.

There will be a reckoning.

It's frightening and exhilarating. In this moment of calm before the storm, Will grins.

The clouds continue to gather above his house as they darken within his mind. The storm is swiftly building, a dam about to burst. The fire will come, burning and deadly. The question raging in Will's mind is, will it consume Will before it consumes Hannibal?

He's unsure.

He breathes in.

He breathes out.

I fled to the city with so much discounted, but I'm flying like a bird to you now

Chapter Notes

> Wrote this sooner than I thought I would. I didn't really have a plan for this. Just started writing and this is where it went. Chapter title from Shrike by Hozier. Hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He’s drowning.

The road is barely visible through his windshield. The sky is a dark writhing mass of clouds and water. The car is buffeted on all sides by wind flinging rain in every direction. He’s only protected from the whims of nature by the metal of his car. But he doesn’t feel protected. He feels trapped in this moving, mechanical mass, blockaded on all sides. His breath catches and doesn’t resume. His chest heaves as he gasps. Suddenly, his foot is slamming on the brakes and the car is skidding on the wet asphalt, the front tires sliding off the side of the road and squelching in the mud of the forest surrounding them.

Will is oblivious to his surroundings as he rips the car door open and almost flings himself from the seat, slamming the door behind him. He’s soaked to the bone before his feet are firmly planted in the soft ground. The rain and wind lash at his face and his curls are already matted to his head as he stands, face upturned towards the heavens, breathing heavily in the fresh air. All is clear and clean for a moment. The constant buzzing is silenced. Only for a moment. A blessed moment.

Then it returns in force and it brings with it the pain in his temples, His right hand clenches where it hangs at his side, stretching the cuts and scratches. He opens his eyes, though the scene is no different than it was with them closed, the darkness pressing in close.

He’s standing on the edge of the empty road that leads towards Baltimore from his middle of nowhere home. Already infrequently traveled, the storm has driven every sane person off the road. He chuckles to himself. Of course, he already knew he wasn’t what could be considered sane. Even as he thinks that, he sees the stag. It’s black coat shining as water droplets collect on the fur and feathers. It stands across the road at the edge of the forest on the other side, identical to the one behind him. The storm quiets and he can hear the huff of its breath in the cold air and the snap of twigs beneath its hooves as it paws at the forest floor. It barely spares him a glance before turning its head and entering the forest. The chaos of the storm returns.

He turns and slams his fist into the car door, seeing red, and it’s not just the blood that stains the previously clean bandages. His hand hits with a dull thud and stays there. His head joins it a moment later, albeit gentler, as he presses his forehead to the freezing glass of the car’s

window, trying to suck that icy coldness into his soul where the fire still burns steadily, no end in sight. He breathes out slowly, watches his breath fog the glass, his only proof of life in this godforsaken night, then fade, leaving only his own ice blue eyes staring back.

He doesn't quite like what he sees reflected back at him so he wrenches the door open, ignoring the small dent in the car's side flecked with blood, and climbs inside. He takes a steadying breath as he closes the door, waiting for the panic to set in, but it never comes.

He sits, waiting. For what he doesn't know. So he waits, unable to turn off the car which he had left running nor reach for the steering wheel and drive.

He wants to move. He can't wait here on the side of the road at close to 10:30 at night, with no distraction for his mind.

And yet here he is.

He closes his eyes, breathing deeply and wades into his stream, casts a line, lets it ground him. The water is rushing and clear, the sky bright and blue. He allows himself a small smile, barely a twitch of his lips.

And then he loses his footing. The line is ripped from his hand. It's not a trickling stream anymore: it's a thundering river, powerful and merciless, pulling him along. He grabs for rocks, branches, anything to grab. His fingernails scrabble at rocks, flashing by, too fast to see. They come away bloody. The roaring fills his ears. He can't see. He can't breathe.

And then his hand catches something and everything slows, as if he's now caught in molasses. He wrenches his eyes open and is met by Abigail's empty ones staring past him. He tries to scream but liquid floods his mouth and that's when he realizes he's floating in a river of blood. Abigail's blood. He pushes past her body, choking on red, trying to escape.

And then the water's gone and he's sitting across from Hannibal. He looks around frantically, scanning the room for Abigail's lifeless eyes. But they're in Hannibal's office in Baltimore and there's no blood anywhere. Or maybe there's blood everywhere. It probably paints the room red. He's just too blind to see it. But who is he to know? He's been blind for so long, almost intentionally it seems.

Hannibal's presence does little to calm him as he meets the man's eyes. Of course, this isn't the real Hannibal. The real Hannibal is usually a balm on the open wound of his mind. Of course that was before. Who knows what he is now.

But still, this Hannibal only unnerves him further. He wants to run. He quickly looks away. He should've told Jack as soon as he became aware of the information that had taken up residence in his subconscious. Why didn't he tell Jack?

"Why are you running, Will?"

His head jerks up to look at Hannibal. His eyes narrow at the psychiatrist's knowing look. "Running to something or from something, Dr. Lecter?"

“Are they not intertwined? Not the same?”

Will shakes his head vehemently. “No, no. They’re opposites. They can’t be… can’t be…”

He trails off still shaking his head, eyes closing on instinct.

“Open your eyes, Will.”

Will doesn’t respond, doesn’t look. His hands clench the armrests of the chair, both hands uninjured in the confines of his mind. He can feel the crescent marks from his nails in the leather. He’s sure Hannibal considers his behavior rude.

“You must see it, Will. Even as you run to me in the middle of a storm, you are running from your own thoughts. Some might call it cognitive dissonance. You must accept them if you are ever to know peace.”

Will feels the tears gathering in the corners of his eyes. “I can’t.”

He feels Hannibal circling his chair, as a hawk circles a field mouse. “Why, Will?”

He is not a mouse.

Will’s eyes fly open and he surges from his chair, grabbing Hannibal by the throat and shoving him until his back hits the bookcase, shaking the books on the shelves. “Because! Because I did nothing to stop you, have still done nothing! And…” His voice breaks then, as he sucks a breath in through his nose, the tears finally overflowing as his grip weakens and he releases Hannibal, stepping back and turning away. “And I won’t do anything,” he finishes.

He feels as if something has been stolen from him. He wants to hate the apparition still standing in front of him, wants to hate the real man, for taking it. But when he reaches for the hate, the anger, he finds only emptiness.

“What have you lost with that admission, Will?” is Hannibal’s only question. He still doesn’t move away from the bookcase.

“Everything,” Will sighs, trying to subtly wipe the tears from his cheeks with his sleeve, though he knows it’s a futile effort as the Hannibal standing across the room has already seen them, not to mention that he knows none of this is real. He shakes his head. “I thought of telling Jack and then immediately discarded that thought. And I don’t know why.” He trembles and runs his hand through his hair. It falls over his forehead as he looks down, staring at the carpeted floor.

Hannibal smiles then and crosses the room. He stops immediately in front of Will, toe to toe. Will can see his finely polished shoes as he continues to examine the ground.

Hannibal hooks a finger under Will’s chin and lifts his head until their eyes meet. Will doesn’t fight it. “You know why, Will.”

Will shivers as his eyes float closed. Images dance across his mind: memories of lingering glances, shared smiles, brushing fingers, shivers down his spine, warmth in his chest.

He exhales quickly, “What does that make me?”

He opens his eyes.

The lights on his dash blink back at him. His weary face is reflected back at him in the dark windshield, rain seeming to trace its way down his cheeks.

His wet hair sends water droplets flying as he shakes his head, clearing the last vestiges of Hannibal’s amber eyes floating like an afterimage in his vision. He shifts the car back into drive and reaches for the steering wheel. His fingers wrap around the worn and familiar vinyl as he pulls back onto the road. It stretches on and on in front of him. The rain still pours and the wind still blows.

His hands tighten around the steering wheel and the spikes of pain that travel through his nervous system remind him of the dried blood staining the bandages wrapped around his torn palm. This awareness also brings the buzzing in the back of his mind and the pounding in his head to the forefront of his consciousness. They’re inescapable.

There’s still a fire in his chest, consuming him from the inside, only now it has a name. And there’s still a flood in his head, drowning him in his own thoughts, only now it has a purpose.

So many questions float down the stream, swirling in eddies round his submerged face, unanswerable, at least by his consciousness, even if it does take the form of Hannibal.

The lies and betrayal still sting deeply, as if Hannibal dipped his hands in acid and then painted lies and constellations on Will’s skin. They burn deeper than any of Hannibal’s actions he knows should horrify him.

Will thinks he knows what that makes him. His mind has been whispering it through the cracks in his forts for awhile now (monster). He just needs to hear Hannibal say it. Then he’ll know.

Chapter End Notes

So there will be a third chapter with real Hannibal in it for sure. He was supposed to be in this one but this went where it wanted to so we'll see him next time :)

words hung above, but never would form, like a cry at the final breath that is drawn

Chapter Notes

> Chapter title from Shrike by Hozier. I had the songs I can't breathe by Bea Miller and would you cry if i died by Elliot in the back of my head while writing this. Just thought I'd let you guys know if you wanted to listen to them. Anyway, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His hand hovers over the door to Hannibal's office. It must be after eleven, but usually the psychiatrist works late. The storm rages outside and in his head, but he still can't bring himself to knock. He can't tell whether he wants to scream or cry, maybe both.

The pain in his head had only worsened on the drive over. He drags his uninjured hand over his face, trying to ease the flames dancing around his head. The longer he waits, the shakier his hands get.

He raises his hand once again to knock but before he can the door is swinging open, followed by the good, or not so good, doctor himself. Will's hand hovers in the space between them for a moment before he realizes and tells his burning brain to lower it. Hannibal only smiles and gestures for him to enter. Will can't meet his eyes as he walks past, never letting Hannibal out of his sight. If Hannibal notices, he doesn't say anything, just softly shuts the door and watches Will for a moment.

Will can't focus on him. If he does he doesn't know what he'll do, hadn't decided on the way over, can't decide now. The hallucination on the side of the road had only given him more questions.

Instead, he examines the office with more concentration than he ever has before, tries to see the blood staining wood and books, the specters he is sure float around Hannibal's head. He doesn't dare look at the man's hands for fear of what stains them.

"Would you like a drink, Will?"

He's startled out of his musings by Hannibal's voice. It's loud in the silence, even with the rain striking the window behind him. He's struck by an urge to watch the water pounding against the glass like enemies assaulting a fort, cracking through defenses. He doesn't want to watch Hannibal crack through his so he turns to the window, back to the murderer behind him.

He doesn't feel uneasy, a pleasant surprise. He almost laughs at the irony. But stops himself before he comes off as any more insane than he already is, trekking to his psychiatrist's office

close to midnight. Although he supposes he's not the only insane one in the room.

It's then that it clicks that Hannibal had said something. He had heard his voice but hadn't processed his words. He licks his chapped lips, looking over his shoulder, "Um, sorry, what?" His voice is scratchy and hoarse. He hadn't realized it'd been that long since he talked to someone. It must have been hours and hours ago. Had he had any water? Oh well.

Hannibal's face doesn't seem to change but Will catches the minuscule twitch of his lips. He's not happy with this response. Will can't be bothered to try to understand why. It's amusing enough that he's reduced to analyzing facial expressions because he can't see through Hannibal. Not yet. Not completely

"A drink, Will," Hannibal clarifies, moving away from the door towards his desk.

Will coughs, trying to clear his throat, "Oh, um, yes… Please." He runs a hand through his still wet hair as Hannibal pulls a bottle of whiskey from a desk drawer. He's reminded that he's soaking and he glances at his path from the door, wincing at the water staining the wood. Hannibal has yet to mention it.

He turns back to the window, tracing a raindrop with his eyes as it weaves down the pane and out of sight. He adds a quiet "sorry" though he's not sure what he's apologizing for: taking so long to respond to Hannibal's question, the water on the floor, or the feelings warring inside him. Probably all of them.

Hannibal appears at his side, his hand hovering near Will's right elbow, glass in hand. Will takes it, fingers brushing against Hannibal's and lingering for a moment. They're warm against his frozen ones, a calming wave washes over him, quieting the fire burning behind his temples, as they separate and he brings the glass to his mouth. The whiskey burns going down. It reminds him of his smashed glass from earlier. He drags his mind back to the present with thoughts of how much more expensive this is than his own cheap stuff, now watering the lawn where he'd spilled it.

He glances at Hannibal, still standing facing him, glass in hand, undrunk.

Reality flashes in front of his eyes, like a glitch in a film. His hands are wrapped around Hannibal's throat, constricting. Hannibal's face never shifts from his poised smile, a facade. Will wants it gone. Hannibal's throat is warm under his hands, blood pulsing beneath his palms. He feels powerful.

And then it changes. His thumb is brushing lightly across Hannibal's cheek, palm resting on his neck. The facade of the composed doctor is gone. Hannibal's throat is warm under his hands, blood pulsing beneath his palms. He feels powerful.

Then it's back to the real Hannibal, standing with a glass of undrunk whiskey in his hand, still staring, still analyzing. Will turns away, banishing those thoughts. He has never seen Hannibal vulnerable. The second hallucination is a lie, constructed by his mind, from a time before he knew everything. Before Hannibal lied to him. The first is a possible truth. Possible, but improbable Will concedes as he takes another sip of his whiskey and tries to imagine a life without the man at his side.

They wait in silence for seconds, minutes, hours, millennia. Will isn't sure, doesn't think he minds either way. All he knows is the storm doesn't stop, won't stop. And their confrontation is inevitable.

Hannibal, it seems, is content to wait Will out, wait for Will to explain his presence in his office, in his life.

Will sighs as he sets his empty whiskey glass on the window sill. Hannibal has had only a few sips of his own but he reaches for Will's glass and retreats to his desk to refill them.

As good a time as any Will thinks. He saw the scalpel on Hannibal's desk. He just hopes Hannibal doesn't use it, hopes he grants him the intimacy of his hands in death.

He hears the sound of whiskey topping off his glass. "I know," he whispers into the silence. He knows Hannibal's heard him when the whiskey stops and the bottle clinks as he sets it on the desk.

Hannibal seems amused as he says, "Know what, Will? What secrets of the universe have you discovered?"

"Everything," is all he can breathe out, his shoulders slumping at the admission.

He knows Hannibal knows what he means when there's no response. The silence engulfs him, changes to rushing in his ears. He turns before he tries to punch the window.

Hannibal is there, so close he can feel his breath on his lips. He sighs in resignation, in acceptance, as Hannibal's hands wrap around his throat. He doesn't fight it.

He gasps for air as Hannibal's thumbs press further, cutting off his air supply. The force of it pushes them both back until Will's back is to the window. He can feel the piercing cold through his jacket. It seems unfair that the pain in his throat doesn't cancel out the pain in his head. He feels his pulse pump in time with the pound, pound, pound of his headache.

He tries to make out Hannibal's expression through the darkening haze descending over his vision, expecting the cool smile of a killer, or even a blank facade. Instead, there's pain in his eyes, a frown marring his features. It's not right.

He focuses through the darkness, his brain still fighting. He manages to pull his hands up to Hannibal's with herculean effort. He latches on before his strength leaves, not to fight but to reassure, and brushes a thumb over Hannibal's wrists. He even tries a smile, hopes Hannibal knows it means forgiveness. He only now realizes he forgave Hannibal a long time ago, before he was even aware of it. He's glad his gesture isn't a lie.

He can't see Hannibal's answering expression, doesn't know if he received the message. His hands fall from Hannibal's wrists, no more strength to hold them up. It's almost peaceful.

And then he's gasping for air as it tries to flow through his bruised windpipe. He can see afterimages of light. They flash across his eyes as he slides down the window and wall, landing in a heap on the floor. Sensation returns in waves: feeling in his fingers as they

twitch, the cold in his bones, his wet clothes rubbing against his skin, the pounding in his temple worsening, and the fire in his lungs and throat.

He focuses on the feel of air rushing through his mouth, filling his lungs, and the pulse of his heart and blood. He had barely noticed it before but it's absence now makes it ring in his head, faster than he ever remembers it. The room is a mess of churning colors as if an artist had dipped his brush into Will's vision and swirled it around. Where is he? He can't remember.

There's something moving through his vision and then it's touching him, turning his head back and forth which doesn't help his aching head. He closes his eyes against the too bright room. The fingers ghosting over his neck are gentle but he can feel the power thrumming through them, the strength to snap his neck if they so desired. It seems they don't want that however, as they rest on his cheek for a moment, warmth emanating from them and flowing through his veins, comforting and steadying. He leans into them, craving the warmth that is so lacking in his life. They contract slightly as if surprised, but they don't move. Will sighs.

He's exhausted and in pain and he just wants to sleep, the warmth lulling him into a sense of peace. He doesn't remember the last time he slept. But other memories are starting to rush through his head, carried on the waters of a stream, swirling behind his eyes. They're confusing and bright. There's flashes of hands around a throat but he can't tell if they're his hands or Hannibal's.

Hannibal.

His eyes fly open, sending a stab of pain to his brain, but he ignores it. The world has stopped swirling quite as much. It's a little unsteady but Hannibal is there. His face visible as he leans over Will. The fingers still resting on his cheek are his.

With great difficulty Will pulls away, hands grasping for the wall, pulling himself up. Hannibal rises with him, his hands hovering near Will's chest as if he wants to reach out and steady him. "Will, please. I really must protest this course of action. You need to stay still."

Will ignores his entreaty and stumbles past him to one of the armchairs in the middle of the room, leaning on it, as he tries to catch his breath. "Rich, coming from you, seeing as you're the one who just tried to kill me," he wheezes out, his throat protesting as he devolves into a coughing fit, eyes screwed closed against the light that continues to drive shards of glass into his head.

When he's able to breathe again, albeit shakily, he slowly opens his eyes, grateful to find the lights are now off. Hannibal is in front of him again, but his arm is extended to Will, glass of water in hand. Will just stares at it. "Please, Will."

Will turns away from Hannibal. He lowers his head, gazing at his hand resting on the back of the armchair, helping prop his body up on shaky legs. His voice is raspy and strained as he speaks. It hurts but he needs to know. "Why did you stop?"

When Hannibal doesn't respond he turns to look at him. He's unnaturally still and his face is carefully blank as he stands there. He's only that inexpressive if he's truly feeling something.

Will knows that much at least. He just doesn't know what the psychiatrist is feeling.

For a moment it appears he's going to protest the conversation but then, slowly, Hannibal lowers the glass of water and sets it on a side table, moving to sit in his armchair. He gestures for Will to do the same. Will doesn't move.

"Please sit, Will." Will bristles but it's apparent Hannibal refuses to speak if Will doesn't sit down. He tries not to let the relief show on his face as he collapses into the chair.

They sit there in heavy silence, waiting. Always waiting. Will is tired of waiting. If Hannibal isn't going to kill him, at least right now, he wants answers. He hadn't thought he'd get the chance to ask questions, hadn't prepared for this. Now there's too many whirling through his head to keep track of. And Hannibal has yet to even answer the one he'd already asked. So he waits. Just a little bit longer.

Finally Hannibal speaks, his face still blank, "Why didn't you stop me?"

"That's rude, Doctor, answering my question with another question," Will tries to shake his head in admonishment, but finds that is more pain than even he can handle right now. His stomach churns at the sudden motion and he tries to close his eyes. He finds the darkness reaching for him and decides that isn't the best course of action if he wants to be conscious for this conversation, so he wrenches his eyes open again.

"I apologize." Hannibal's finger is tapping out a rhythm against the arm of his chair. Will's gaze is drawn to the motion. He's never seen the doctor this nervous, hadn't thought he was capable of it. "I-" he swallows. Will is amused and almost scared by the lack of the facade, the vulnerability he's being shown. He picks at the bandage wrapped around his hand to avoid staring, and to help him concentrate. It's hard to think with the pain radiating out from every part of his body.

"I was… unsure of your motivations in coming here. I did not know what you intended when you told me of your revelation. It was… impulsive of me, careless." He sighs and seems to notice his finger moving of its own accord. The tapping swiftly stops, leaving only the sound of rain to fill the silence. "Why didn't you stop me?" he asks again.

Will knows Hannibal hasn't told the full truth, has barely answered the question but he's too tired to push, too tired to lie. What does it matter how he felt… feels. So he answers, "I forgave you." Three words. They're too simple, too short for all the time, thoughts, pain poured into them. But they're true and he says them as easy as breathing. Well, as easy as breathing would be if he hadn't recently been strangled almost to unconsciousness. He smiles grimly at that, his hand falling from the bandages wrapped around his other palm to his lap as he looks up and meets Hannibal's eyes.

They're questioning as he looks at Will. Will smiles. He thinks the lack of oxygen has made him loopy because he doesn't even hesitate to respond to Hannibal's unasked question. Just looks around the room to avoid Hannibal's gaze as he talks and starts messing with the bandages again. "I forgave you," he shrugs, "for the lies, trying to kill me, everything I guess." He huffs a quiet laugh that burns his throat, but he doesn't care. "It wasn't easy, but I tried to be angry, tried to hate you, even thought about killing you." He gestures to the bruises

ringing his throat, “Same way you tried to kill me. But I just felt empty. The anger wouldn’t stay and I knew if I tried to keep it, it would break me.”

His throat burns from talking and he reaches for the water Hannibal had left for him, he drains the whole glass before he sees the blood he’s left smeared on its side. He sets it down again and examines his hand. It seems messing with the bandages wasn’t the best idea. His cuts have opened again, sluggishly leaking and staining the bandages red. He watches the stain spread, blinking stupidly as he tries to absorb what’s happening. His brain’s processing has slowed down and he doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do.

He doesn’t even notice Hannibal moving until he’s kneeling in front of Will’s chair, reaching for Will’s hand. But he stops short, his hand hesitating. Will looks up, again surprised to see matching hesitation in Hannibal’s eyes as he waits, unsure if he’s allowed to touch. He’s looking at his own hovering hand as if it’s alien to him. And Will supposes it is. Hannibal’s never hesitant. Will’s strangely happy that he’s the only one to witness Hannibal’s vulnerability in this moment.

Will quickly has mercy and puts him out of his misery, moving his hand so it bumps Hannibal’s and nodding slightly when Hannibal’s eyes jerk up to meet his in surprise and question. And then Hannibl’s fingers are pulling back the bandages, sure as ever, gentle as they brush over the gashes. Will can’t hide the shiver that travels up his spine. He’s sure Hannibal notices it when his face goes blank again, but he doesn’t stop his ministrations.

“When did you realize?”

Will leans his head back, trying not to strain his neck, and stares at the ceiling, a familiar view, as Hannibal continues to examine his hands. “I think ages ago. At least subconsciously. But… today. Today I actually noticed that I’d figured it out.” His empty hand flexes in his lap and then reaches up to brush against the bruises on his neck. “At first, I didn’t even think about what you’d done,” he swallows and it stabs at his neck. “... Who you’d killed. I was just angry that you’d lied to me. Even now, when you’ve tried to kill me,” Hannibal’s hands flinch at that, “I couldn’t find the anger to hate you for those peoples’ deaths, or my own, had you continued.” He laughs again and pulls his hand away from Hannibal’s, tilting his head down to meet Hannibal’s upturned eyes. “What does that make me?”

Hannibal stands, walking across the room to his desk and opens another desk drawer. He pulls out what seems to be a first aid kit and returns to kneeling in front of Will. He busies himself with pulling out gauze and bandages. Finally he stops, materials neatly laid out by Will’s feet, and looks up at Will, making sure he has Will’s entire focus before he speaks, “It makes you human, Will.” And then he’s pulling a needle out of the kit, “Some of these bigger cuts require stitches.”

Will hums in assent and contemplates Hannibal’s answer. They sit in comfortable silence as Hannibal stitches and rebandages Will’s hand. Will nods off to the steady pull of thread through his skin, an all too familiar sensation. He supposes Hannibal with a sharp object should be even more frightening than him without but there’s no fear left in him. He’s too tired and if Hannibal wanted to kill him there’s nothing he could or would do to stop him.

He's woken by Hannibal's hands on his cheek for the second time that night, the warmth is still comforting though his clothes have dried by now, and he's struck by how strange a picture they paint. Hannibal's a serial killer who attempted to murder him and then patched him up, all within the span of fifteen minutes. He can't help that sleepy laugh that falls from his lips as his eyes open to see Hannibal's hand drop from his face. The doctor moves to replace the first aid kit in it's drawer, but glances back at him and his lips twitch upwards.

He crosses the room and takes Will's arms, helping him stand, and then wraps it around his shoulder. Will tries to protest but when he stumbles on his first step towards the door he concedes that the help is useful.

Hannibal grabs his coat and locks the door and starts helping Will to his car. Will pulls away, trying to stumble to his own car. "I can drive myself, Hannibal." HIs point is undercut by the shaking of his limbs and his eyelids fluttering closed, even as he speaks. His eyes are almost too heavy to stay open. Traitors, he thinks, as Hannibal chuckles and he allows the bigger man to half drag, half carry him out the door and through the rain to his car.

Will doesn't remember the drive to his house, nor how Hannibal got him inside and changed his clothes into his normal sleep shirt and boxers.

The next thing he processes is Winston snuffling at his feet as Hannibal attempts to get him to lay down in bed. He's all too happy to crash into the blankets, searching for warmth, hoping his exhaustion will lend itself to a dreamless slumber. The pounding in his head has lessened to its normal constant pressure behind his eyes and his neck still aches but he's already half asleep again so he doesn't find the strength to care.

Hannibal pulls the sheets over him and turns, but before he can leave, Will catches his hand in his own, pulling him back. "Stay," he whispers into the silence that isn't quite silence, not when there's dogs whining, and rain dripping, and the sounds of the forest outside his door. But it's quiet enough.

He can barely make out Hannibal's face from below his drooping eyelids and the darkness engulfing them both, knows he won't be able to say anything else to convince Hannibal if he decides to leave. He's too close to sleep. But Hannibal nods and toes off his shoes. Will's hand drops so Hannibal can discard his jacket and suit, leaving him in an undershirt and sweatpants he grabs from Will's drawer. The fire in his chest softens when Hannibal slides under the sheet next to him.

He's too tired to care about how this looks or what it means. All he knows is he wants to be close to Hannibal. And so he moves into Hannibal's space and rests his head on Hannibal's chest, finding comfort in the warmth. He feels the air leave Hannibal's chest and he smiles. As Hannibal drapes his arm over the smaller man's waist, Will drifts off, his thoughts lingering on the irony of feeling the safest he's ever felt in a killer's arms of all places.

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking of writing another chapter for this so we'll see :) lmk if you liked it! comments give me motivation to write more!

there's something lonesome about you, something so wholesome about you, get closer to me

Chapter Notes

Chapter title from From Eden by Hozier

I listened to the songs Trampoline by SHAED and War by former vandal while writing this and they reminded me of these two just in case you guys wanted to check those out. Hope you guys like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He wakes slowly, almost blissfully, consciousness returning in waves.

His first, half-formed thought is of the exhaustion that had settled in his bones the night before. It's strangely lacking now. He feels lighter somehow. This is the first night in months that he can remember sleeping through the night peacefully. That doesn't mean the exhaustion is fully gone though. One night of peace doesn't negate the months of restlessness. But the bone deep exhaustion has lessened, instead settling just beneath his skin. It's less noticeable, almost familiar.

He feels the remnants of warmth, not just physically, but somewhere in his chest. Like the memory of a blanket that's been shrugged off or a steaming cup of coffee that's been abandoned, leaving the heat to fade away.

And the cold is swiftly taking its place.

He shivers and his eyes float open. He blinks at the sunlight streaming in from the open windows. Winston is sniffing at the side of the bed. Will reaches a hand out to pet his head without turning, assuring the concerned dog that he's ok.

He hasn't had a dream like that in months. They're normally drowned in blood and false gods, where he's a traitor, a fallen angel, wings turned black, bodies strewn around him. He's not sure if this one wasn't worse. It probably was.

He sits up, glancing to the side at his alarm clock. Immediately, he freezes as his entire focus is consumed by the fiery pain in his neck. He wraps both hands around his neck, the bandage on his palm scraping against aggravated skin as he tries to find blood, find where his throat's been cut. His hands come away clean, but the pain doesn't stop. He holds still, waiting for the swells to subside, as his stomach flips and his eyes dart feverishly around the room, searching for a figure that should be near if the dream was reality.

His dogs are whining to go out near the door, there's birds chirping, and there's water dripping off the roof outside. But there's nothing else. No movement, no other sounds except his heavy breathing. He glances to the other side of the bed. The sheets are wrinkled, but that's not unusual with Will's tossing and turning. There's an imprint on the other pillow however, that's not from his head. He stares at it as if his gaze can manifest the person that had been there. Slowly, he stretches his hand out, resting it lightly, almost reverently, on the pillow. The warmth is almost gone, barely noticeable.

But Will notices. He always notices. There's a lack of warmth in his life, makes the occasional warmth all the more noticeable… and wanted. He doesn't know what he's allowed to feel at knowing he didn't dream the past evening.

Winston's nose bumps his other hand, still laying on the edge of the bed. He catches himself before he tries to turn his head which would cause the dull ache in his neck to again turn to stabbing pain. Instead he turns his whole body away from the empty pillow with a sigh. He pats Winston's head and untangles his legs from the sheets so he can stumble to the door, rubbing his uninjured hand over his face, trying to clear his head. It doesn't work.

He pushes the door open, cold air enveloping him, and shivers again, standing in the door in a shirt and briefs. He watches as the dogs sprint past his legs, running in the wet grass and barking at a squirrel in a tree. There's a freedom, an innocence there. Hannibal would say naiveté. Will can imagine his strolling up the driveway, explaining how he just went to grab a suitable breakfast for them because Will's pantry is truly bare. He screws his eyes shut against the image, lest his brain take it as an invitation to conjure the very familiar hallucination. He only opens them when the dogs are once again brushing past his legs as they reenter the house.

Will stays standing in the doorway for another moment. He spots Hannibal's car in the driveway. His own is still parked in front of Hanibal's office in downtown Baltimore. How Hannibal got a cab to come all the way out to Wolf Trap is beyond him, but Hannibal has his ways.

He contemplates calling Jack and saying he's sick, but he'd already left early and in a rush yesterday. There'll be questions, more than he wants to answer. And they're in the middle of a case. And he has classes to teach.

He sighs again, glaring, as if they've offended him, at the sea of trees that stops yards from his door, not daring to come any closer. And maybe they have offended him. He feels different, like something's teetering on the edge of falling into place inside him. He's standing on a precipice: one wrong step and he'll plummet. He's not sure yet if that's a good thing or a bad one. But who is he to judge morality?

And yet, the trees stay the same. And work plods on.

He turns away from the chilly winter air. It's refreshing but it reminds him too much of the warmth that's missing. He doesn't usually notice but it was so close last night. He was so close.

He shakes his head, curls falling over his eyes, and his neck burns. It's an almost welcome distraction this time. He expects the full embarrassment of reaching for Hannibal last night to wash over him, but instead it barely stings. In fact there's a distinct lack of embarrassment. There were so many feelings last night, crashing over him. He supposes he only gets so many emotions that are his own. The rest are dedicated to feeling and understanding the emotions of others. It leaves him empty. It's probably what he deserves.

He spots the keys to Hannibal's car on his side table, glinting in the sunlight streaming through the window. He wants a shower.

He gets ready in a haze, showering and dressing the best he can to cover the bruises on his neck. He knows they're still very visible but he'll just say he got jumped. He can't be bothered to fabricate a more believable lie. As long as it doesn't affect his work, Jack is sure to ignore it.

He sets out food for the dogs before grabbing a protein bar for himself. Then he climbs into Hannibal's car. He sits in the driver's seat, staring out the window. His mind flashes to the man that usually occupies this seat. He hears the screaming as he knocks someone unconscious and then gracefully shoves their body in the trunk. And then he's Will again. He glances to the clock in the dashboard. His name is Will Graham. He's in Wolf Trap, Virginia. It's 7:42 AM. He curses loudly: he's going to be late. He quickly starts the car and steadfastly ignores the screaming that rings in his ears.

The drive to Quantico is uneventful. He passes by the side of the road where he stopped last night to have his breakdown. He catches a glimpse of a stag but he resolutely doesn't look a second time to confirm it, only stares blankly at the empty road stretching out in front of him

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Sure enough, his car is sitting in the parking lot at Quantico. He's not sure how Hannibal drove it without the keys, which he confirms are sitting in his pocket. He wouldn't quite be surprised if Hannibal knew how to hot-wire, just wonder where he picked it up.

He carefully avoids Jack throughout the day, not venturing outside his classroom between classes to minimize the risk of running into him or Alana or any of the science team in the halls. He glares enough at the students to prevent any questions about the bruises, but he's sure by the end of the day the school will be swirling with rumors of who he'd slept with. He assumes most of the bets will be placed on him and Alana.

He finds himself sitting at his desk after lunch, in which he still hadn't eaten, staring at his computer screen. It's at the lowest brightness setting but it's still burning his eyes and he feels the beginnings of a headache forming behind his eyes. He sighs and drags a hand through his curls and down his face, closing the computer with the other. The crime scene photos are all blurring together anyway and he knows his focus is elsewhere.

There's a knock in the hall and he drops his hand from his face, head lifting to see the subject of his focus stroll into his lecture hall. The headache threatening him starts to subside in the man's presence. There's not a hair out of place and his suit is impeccable as always. Even his

shoes are polished. Not a hint that he tried to kill Will last night and then dragged him home and tucked him into bed in the pouring rain.

Will's pretty sure he looks like he's been hit by a truck in comparison, with his loose tie and dark circles under his eyes. He nods at Hannibal waiting patiently in the entryway. With Will's permission, Hannibal crosses the space to Will's desk slowly but purposefully as if he thinks Will will startle, as if he's an injured animal. Will bristles at the perceived affront and lowers his eyes to the papers littering his desk. His eyes land on his injured hand. He thinks back to that morning, thinks he probably should have changed the bandages. Oh well, another thing to forget about later tonight.

Hannibal seems to pick up on the offense he's caused Will because he is the first to speak, "I apologize." Will's eyes flick up and down Hannibal's imposing figure, sizing him up, before they return to staring at, but not really seeing, the essays he's supposed to be grading. Hannibal continues, "I should not have left without informing you or leaving a note. It was unspeakably rude of me."

Will doesn't look up, just waves his hand dismissively. He's not mad about that. He's not really mad about anything. He's just… numb and not even Hannibal's warming presence is enough to jolt him back to life. Not right now. He supposes he truly has used up his allotment of emotion. He wonders how long he'll be resigned to this emptiness in his chest before he's allowed another emotion.

"Will, may I ask you a question?" Hannibal asks.

Will glances up at him smirking, "Are you going to ask me anyway, Doctor?"

"No," Hannibal says and his eyes are sincere. The smirk melts off Will's face. "Not if you do not wish me to. And you have no obligation to answer even if you allow me to ask it."

Will's taken aback by Hannibal's response. No one else bothers to ask him if he wants to answer something, even if it is personal. It's expected of him. It's his job to provide answers and then everyone carefully avoids looking as he shatters in front of them.

He nods slowly, careful of his abused neck.

"Why did you forgive me, Will?"

Will sighs. Hannibal's not pulling any punches with his choice in questions. But his face is open, clear. It doesn't seem like a mask. The option of refusing to answer floats across his consciousness but oddly it's the possibility of choice that spurs him to try to answer when he's not even fully sure of the answer himself. "I've already given you the short answer," he tugs at his collar, pulling Hannibal's eyes to the bruises, a reminder of their, admittedly, short conversation the night before.

Hannibal's eyes narrow, "The long answer then. If you wish to share it."

Will laughs softly. He's an awfully polite killer. "I guess it's because you're just… clearer," he gestures to Hannibal and pauses, trying to order his thoughts, to elaborate. Hannibal waits

patiently in the middle of the room, maintaining their distance.

Will doesn't want distance. He pushes his chair back and stands, circling the desk, to lean on its edge, nothing left separating him and Hannibal but empty space. He doesn't know what that will accomplish but maybe he thinks the less space there is the easier the doctor will understand him. Or maybe he just wants to be closer to Hannibal.

"It's like…" he struggles for a metaphor to make himself understood, finally snatching one from the river of his thoughts. "It's like I need glasses and when I take them off the whole world is blurred around the edges. But not you. You're… clear, sharp." His eyes trace the outline of Hannibal's figure. "All jagged edges. Like if I get too close…" his hand lifts off the desk, reaching, "I'll get cut, come away bloody." His eyes catch on his fingers outstretched to Hannibal, mesmerized by the memory of blood staining his palm, and he drops it. His hand lands with a quiet thump back on the desk behind him, his cheeks warm.

He looks up, meeting Hannibal's eyes, but he can't hold his gaze for long, his eyes leaving and roving across empty seats and grey walls, finally coming to rest on the ground by Hannibal's feet. "There's a cold fire in my bones, licking its way through my veins. You have a… warmth that satisfies it."

Hannibal's facial expression doesn't change but Will feels understood. The words keep flowing, like a dam's been broken and he's unable to stop the out pour. "It's like the world is a painting. All the colors are swirled together, blended, but not you. And everyone is painted on, stationary. Or if they're not stationary, they're moving so slow they might as well be. But not you. You're always moving, always clear."

Hannibal nods like Will hasn't just rambled nonsense, like there was knowledge in his words, like he understands. "Have you ever considered that they creep along like snails, like they're caught in molasses, because you are too fast for them? You are the falcon, the predator, that all other birds gaze on in jealousy and fear. Your mind is beautiful, something they could never hope to match or comprehend. They envy you your genius and for that they scorn you."

Will scoffs, "Of course I've considered it, Doctor Lecter. It doesn't make it true."

Hannibal only cocks his head, waiting, always waiting.

"Half the things I think and see aren't true, Doctor. They don't envy me for my genius. They pity me. And I understand why because that's my curse. The world is a haze to me. My dreams are more alive than this reality. They're clearer, like you. You: a dream creature come to life." He laughs loudly this time.

"I didn't stop you for that reason. My dreams in sleep are more real than my life in waking. And is sleep not just a temporary death? Why not make the sharpness of my dreams more permanent in death? I've contemplated it enough but my life has been the clearest it's ever been since I met you, and if you didn't want me in it, death seemed the better option than returning to fog after knowing there's more. That's why I forgave you. You simply exist and my life is better for it, more real." He exhales sharply, out of breath from his tirade.

There's absolute silence in the room and in his head. He casts about for something to say and finds that there is nothing left. It's comforting in a strange way.

"You facilitated your own demise, manipulated me into thinking I needed you dead." Hannibal shakes his head, grinning. "We are more alike than I thought possible."

Will just shrugs, his lips twitching upwards, and says, "Perhaps."

"Do you know why I left last night?" Hannibal says, his lips slowly tugging down. The smile never leaves but it turns rueful. But his face remains open and his eyes are soft. He seems almost admiring. As if Will is something to be admired.

Will's smile falls and he shakes his head. Hannibal continues, "I was afraid. You look at me and see sharp edges and fear being cut. I look at you and see tendrils reaching for me and..." He swallows, "I fear being consumed."

Will stares at Hannibal for a moment and then his smile creeps back on his face and he mutters, "Ironic," under his breath.

Hannibal's face lightens and he chuckles. "But no more, Will. I realize you've already consumed me more than I had realized. And you are free to consume the rest. As long as you cease planning your own death."

Will's smile grows, "I do have an excellent psychiatrist. And you've already cut me, Hannibal. You've scarred my morality. I need to make my peace with that. And I will. " He shrugs, carefully avoiding straining his neck, "Better to be hated together than hated alone."

"Indeed."

Will takes a small step forward, eyes flickering over Hannibal's face.

"Will!" He jerks around to see Bev striding into his classroom, a wide grin plastered over her face. She notices Hannibal half-way through the door, "Oh, Doctor Lecter. I don't mean to interrupt but Jack needs Will in the morgue. You're welcome to join him."

"Thank you, Miss Katz." Hannibal nods courteously to her, much better at disguising his feelings than Will who is openly glaring.

Bev smiles at Hannibal and glances to Will, ignoring his pointed stare. He can tell the moment she spots the bruises on his neck he'd been too distracted to try to discreetly keep from her view. Her eyes widen almost comically and Will sighs internally.

"Will, what happened? Are you alright?" She rushes past Hannibal to Will's side, trying to see the bruises through his hands with which he's trying to readjust his collar to hide them. Will glances in Hannibal's direction, trying to gauge his reaction. Something flashes through the doctor's eyes, unnoticeable to anyone else. But Will is not anyone else and he almost smiles when he identifies it as nervousness. That Hannibal is still unsure about whether or not Will would turn him in is laughable, but Will finds it endearing to know he's not quite as presumptuous as he displays.

“I’m quite alright, Bev,” he reassures, sidestepping her searching hands. “I was jumped last night, but it’s no big deal. They didn’t take anything.”

She steps back but fixes him with a piercing stare, “Did you file a report?”

“Bev, it’s fine. Don’t worry about it.” Will argues, already stepping past her towards the door. “Now doesn’t Jack need me?”

She sighs, defeated. “Yes, yes, but you know I worry about you, Will.”

A different warmth fills his chest, different than Hannibal’s warmth but a comfort nonetheless. He grins as he passes Hannibal and sees a matching smile sparkling in the man’s eyes. “I know. Thanks, Bev.”

Will steps out of the classroom into the busy hallway, his head immediately spiking in pain at the onslaught of emotion present in the hall. He glances back to reassure himself of Hannibal’s presence. He’s met by Hannibal’s hand wrapping around his own and squeezing before he drops it and moves past Will towards the morgue. It sends a jolt of warmth down Will’s spine and his smile is bright as he trails after the doctor.

Beverly stands in the doorway to Will’s classroom and watches Will follow Hannibal down the hall. Her eyes narrow at the bruises still visible above Will’s collar. Something’s not right.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly this fic is writing itself. I have no plans at all and no idea where this is going so if you guys have any ideas feel free to share. I make no promises that I'll end up including them but I'm open to ideas. Hope you liked it. Thanks guys!

Ain't it warming you, the world gone up in flames? Ain't it the life you, you're lighting of the blaze?

Chapter Notes

Chapter title from NFWMB by Hozier

So sorry for the wait guys. I kinda lost motivation for awhile cause I just couldn't get it right. But here it is. Finally. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They're all gathered around the third body they'd discovered a few days ago. Will hasn't looked at it today, doesn't have to look at it to know what he'll see. It's etched in his memory from when they found it, along with every other body he's ever seen.

The morgue is empty except for the science team and Jack. It's cold as always, better for the bodies, and the metal everywhere reflects the bright fluorescent lights directly back at his retinas. He blinks away the growing headache and resolves to take some aspirin after Jack's done with him.

Hannibal's steadying presence is still behind him.

"He is saving these people. He feels justified, righteous, like a god." Will exhales sharply. He sees himself, a bloody savior choosing those to live and die. He shakes his head and the image melts back into the stream. He feels Hannibal's eyes on him. He wishes they weren't.

"So if he deems them in need of saving they should have criminal records," Jack says, leaning over the body towards Will.

"No, no, not necessarily. He didn't," Will gestures at the body in front of him, eyes never leaving Jack's chest. He tries to focus on the wrinkles in the man's tie instead of the empty eyes he feels looking up at him. "They're just someone who happened to be cruel in his presence and he condemned them." He wants to scream. He exhales instead, "The cruelest ones are never caught." He doesn't look at Hannibal.

"Well, then how do we find him?" Jack says, gesturing widely and glaring at Will.

Will bristles at his tone, as if he's deliberately hindering the case. He feels anger building in his chest but it oddly doesn't feel directed at Jack. Jack has been harsher and Will rarely has the urge to throw something. Instead he speaks, softly, coldly, "I don't know, Jack. Why don't you consult with some of the other members of your team?" Hannibal's eyes haven't left him but he can feel their gaze weighing heavier on his back. Bev glances worriedly at him and

Zeller and Price share matching glances. And then the anger's gone, sucked out of him, and the emptiness returns. Just when he thought maybe it had left.

"Well, figure it out, all of you," Jack half-yells, gesturing around the room, before striding quickly out of the morgue. He may as well have stormed or slammed a nonexistent door. His frustration was palpable.

Will feels Bev's saddened eyes on him and Hannibal's light touch on his shoulder blade. He shrugs them both off, following Jack's path to the door. He's all too happy to escape the smell of antiseptic and the bright, unfeeling atmosphere that reminds him too much of the place where his heart should be.

He takes a shortcut across the campus and doesn't check if Hannibal's following him until he reaches his car. The doctor is nowhere in sight as he glances around the still full parking lot. He doesn't know if he's glad or disappointed. The storm of a few days ago had gone as quickly as it had come, leaving the sun to beat down on his curls, not a cloud in the sky. He stands by his car and rests his hand on the hood. The metal burns his palm. He doesn't move it.

His palm is still red as he drives home, still red when he opens the door to his house.

…

He doesn't know how long he sits with his dogs around his feet, whiskey in hand, trying to ignore the conversation in the morgue. He swirls the whiskey around in his glass and his thoughts mirror it, swirling around his skull. He's not sure why he can't stop thinking about it. He chuckles. That's usually what his therapy sessions are for, but he hasn't spoken to Hannibal outside of work since that fateful night. It's as if they're balancing on the edge of a knife, neither sure which way it will fall, but not wanting to tip it.

It will fall soon.

...

When Hannibal shows up at his door, dinner in hand, Will can't even pretend to be surprised. He's been expecting it since he walked out of the morgue, since their conversation in his classroom days earlier. It seems there will be a therapy session tonight.

He stands, displacing the dogs at his feet, and sets the whiskey down on the side table before heading for the door. He can see Hannibal standing patiently on the other side of the window. The doorknob is cold against his burned palm as he yanks it open. The weather is cooling in the fading light as they stand, toe to toe, neither moving.

Will speaks first, managing to pull some ire from the depths of the grasping emptiness trying to choke him, "What are you doing here, Hannibal?"

Hannibal smiles, ignoring Will's tone, and lifts the bag dangling from his fingers a few inches as if it's his main reason for stopping by, "Just checking in on a friend."

Will scoffs, loudly, but steps aside so Hannibal can step past him. Delaying this conversation will only make it worse. And he just wants it over, wants it all over.

He stands, the open doorway at his back, as he watches Hannibal pet his dogs and then move into the kitchen to begin unpacking whatever food he's brought. Will's thoughts shift to the content of Hannibal's meal and then quickly shy away, leaving them to circle back to the conversations in the classroom and morgue. He ignores both trains of thought. Instead, he shuts the door and returns to nursing his whiskey in his chair.

At some point Hannibal reenters the room, with an elegant dish that one would never have expected to be carried over in tupperwares. Hannibal's talking, most likely explaining the dish, but Will doesn't hear him. The stag's standing by the door.

"Will, Will." His hearing filters back in and he blinks. The stag is gone but Hannibal's still there.

Neither of them had bothered to turn on any lights as the sun had tucked itself away so now the room is draped in shadows from the rising moon. Will looks around as if he can avoid Hannibal's gaze. He doesn't know how long Hannibal's been there, at his house. It probably doesn't matter. He's always there, in Will's head.

"Will, you can't avoid it forever," Hannibal says, setting the plates aside, and lowering himself into the other chair.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean, Doctor." Will carefully avoids meeting Hannibal's eyes, raising the whiskey glass to his mouth.

"Tell me, Will, do you feel righteous?" Hannibal cocks his head, assessing.

Will jerks and sets the glass down a bit too hard, glaring "Do you?"

Hannibal's lips quirk up, "I did not mean to offend you."

Will stands suddenly and turns away. "No, no, it's not-" Will sighs heavily, running his hands over his face, trying to stop it all. "It's not you, Hannibal." He throws his hands up, looking to the ceiling as if he can see right through it to the darkening sky and the stars above. "Well, it's not just you. It's Jack, the case, my fucking head." His hands fall to the crown of his head, pulling at the curls as if he can pull out the fire that's raging in his head. He woke up at the treeline of the forest outside his house last night, Winston whining at his heels. It's getting worse. He'll never be free. And then his mind catches on something random, fished from the stream, a distraction.

He will. He'll. Hell. He wonders why they're so similar. Maybe it's because no matter what he does he'll always be doomed. It seems even his distractions bring him to thoughts he'd rather avoid.

"What are you thinking of, Will?" Hannibal speaks, waiting, slowly, as his voice reels Will's brain back to the present.

When Will's brain finally recalls his surroundings, he speaks. "Nothing," is all he can muster.

"It's always something. There's not a wasted thought when it comes to you, Will." Hannibal tilts his head and sits, crossing his legs and linking his fingers loosely over his knee, elegant and relaxed as ever. Will wants to hit him, wants to see something other than calm composure.

Hannibal catches the thought flitting across Will's face, smirking, he says, "Thinking of killing me, Will?"

Will smiles back, emptily, "No," he says through clenched teeth. It's at best a half-truth and they both know it. Hannibal's smile only grows, wider, wider. It's all bloody teeth. Will can't take it.

Will blinks back into reality, and is surprised to find Hannibal isn't smiling, just looking on, almost concerned. His retort dies on his tongue. He shakes his head softly, eyes returning to the ground. His reason for anger is gone, leaving a gaping hole where it should have been. His other emotions have abandoned him. Again, he thinks sourly. They seem to be doing that on a regular basis now.

Hannibal's calm demeanor is a balm to his addled mind on the best days, when he's swarmed by thoughts and feelings not his own. On the worst it's an endless annoyance, a mask he wants to tear off with his bare hands to see the monster underneath. In this moment it's an anchor to pull him from his own tangled thoughts.

"Today you said the killer felt righteous in his actions. You were upset after," Hannibal states it like a fact. Will supposes it is. Hannibal stands from his chair and walks, slowly, to Will's side. A mirror of that night a millennia ago. Or maybe two days. Time doesn't concern him much.

Will nods even though it's not a question. He knows what Hannibal's getting at, knows where he's going. He doesn't respond.

Hannibal changes the subject, sensing Will isn't going to speak on it any time soon. "You're allowed emotions, Will."

Will glances at him, surprise briefly visible in his eyes, though he guesses it shouldn't be surprising anymore. Hannibal knows his soul, his mind, more than anyone ever has. It's comforting and frightening. "Am I?"

"Yes. But you aren't normal. You never will be."

Will's less surprised with Hannibal's statement this time, though he doesn't think he'll ever be prepared for Hannibal's declarations. "I know," and he is surprised to find it's the truth and he's not saddened by it. His lips twitch up and he glances at Hannibal to find a matching smile resting upon his features.

Will turns away before Hannibal can see the fondness sparkling in his eyes, and falls into his armchair. He wishes he could fall further… is scared of falling further. His smile slowly

melts. He's never been able to hold onto one for long. They all slip through his fingers as his banished thoughts come rushing back.

Hannibal turns, eyes tracking him. "Why were you upset?"

Will doesn't respond. Winston wags his tail and trots over to the armchair, resting his chin on Will's knee. Will smiles softly and reaches out to scratch behind his ears. "You know why."

Hannibal smiles again, "Despite your assumptions, Will, I cannot predict you nor all your feelings."

Will smiles but it's not sincere. He head lolls towards Hannibal as he fixes him with a smirk that seems to say 'really?' Hannibal only continues to smile. Will sighs, leaning his head back and closing his eyes, allowing himself to drift away as he speaks, "Being in that killer's mind was too familiar." He opens his eyes and at Hannibal's questioning glance, he clarifies, "More than normal, I mean. His righteousness was mine and it didn't emanate from him. I realized it was already my own. I felt righteous for keeping your secret, for deciding who was worthy of life." He laughs but it's empty. "Who am I to decide whose actions merit death over trial?"

Hannibal opens his mouth to respond with some half truth or layered metaphor, Will's sure. He continues before Hannibal can utter a syllable. "I was angry. At the killer. At myself," he pauses, "At you."

"That's normal, Will, justified," Hannibal says, stepping closer to Will's chair.

Will locks eyes with Hannibal, "But I forgave you," he replies, almost pleading for an answer that will explain away the strange emptiness and fleeting anger.

Hannibal smiles sadly, "Forgiveness is not a choice." He holds up a hand to stop Will's protests. Will shuts his mouth but continues to glare. "And even though you have forgiven me it does not negate your anger. They are distinct entities, intertwined but separate, just as God is with his creation." Hannibal steps forward again, moving ever closer to Will, who drops his head into his hands. "Forgiveness is an understanding. You understand why I lied and so you have fallen into forgiveness. Your anger and hurt at the lies remains. To heal you must face them and choose to move on." He takes a final step towards Will, stopping right in front of him.

Will doesn't look up. "I can't find them, Hannibal. I keep losing them, my feelings. They're swept away by others' emotions or buried in my mind." He glances up, facing Hannibal, a strange sheen reflected in his eyes, "I'm afraid if I keep losing them, one day I'll never find them again."

Hannibal smiles, a genuine one, "Your emotions will always be your own, Will, no matter how many times you misplace them. You are not a conduit for others. You are your own person." He reaches out. His fingers brush Will's knuckles as gentle as the wind, leaving Will the decision to pull away. Will doesn't. He grabs for Hannibal's hand, craving the warmth, the reassurance that he exists. "You are in need of a way to let them out, Will. I shall always

be here. I could be your anchor if you wished, to help you hold onto your own emotions. You are allowed to feel them."

Will shakes his head and snorts, standing and pulling his hand from Hannibal's as he walks across the room. He stops in front of the window. He can barely make out the trees at the edge of the forest. There's no stars. He reaches out and rests his unbandaged hand on the glass of the window. It's cold, freezing against the skin he burnt earlier that day. It sinks into his skin and spears straight for his heart that floats aimlessly in the emptiness in his chest. "My brain seems to disagree, Doctor. My feelings… They're missing, toppled overboard into the space between thoughts."

And then there's a tugging on the hand by his side, a warmth counteracting the cold seeping into his palm in the window. Hannibal's fingers are rough against his. He can feel the callouses, from the pen or the knife he can't tell. They're not dissimilar; both are weapons in his hand.

Hannibal tugs him around. Will doesn't fight it, isn't afraid. As he turns, he sees the dogs piled in their beds, the abandoned food cooling on the table, his unfinished whiskey sitting where he'd left it. It's all surprisingly mundane for what they'd discussed, for who they are.

He feels himself floating away from his body, drifting outside himself, driven away by the closeness of Hannibal's body, afraid, not of what Hannibal will do, but what he himself will do at their proximity.

He realizes it's quiet, only the sound of their breaths mingling in the air. Hannibal's eyes catch on his and they're warm, amber in the scarce light. He's smiling softly. Will's never seen him this open, thinks maybe this is the key. If he sees behind the mask now, truly past all the layers, perhaps he'll gain the sight, the ability, to see past it all the time, instead of rare glances when the devil's distracted.

Hannibal leans forward, his breath ghosting across Will's lips. Will shivers. Hannibal moves slowly, giving him time to jerk away, but Will can't move. And then Hannibal's lips meet his. It's warm and soft, chaste, just a press of lips before he's leaning back. Will still can't stir. The storm inside is gone, swept away. He revels in the calm, the stillness. The raging fire has burned out, leaving a warm, heavy blanket of ash coating his insides. It's comforting and suffocating. He wants it to cover him forever.

Hannibal's smile hasn't fallen from his face as he looks at Will. Will blinks. "Do you feel something now, Will?"

Will wants to kill him. He surges forward and crashes their lips together again, pressing against Hannibal, forcing him back a step. His hand leaves Hannibal's loose grasp and follows his other bandaged one up to Hannibal's lapels, anchoring him. The kiss is rough, messy, neither one of them prepared. Will pushes them back a few steps until Hannibal's back hits the table, shaking it. The forks and abandoned plates clatter and the dogs respond loudly but they're ignored.

Will is too preoccupied with Hannibal under his fingertips, unresistant as Will's hands roam his chest, scratching at his collarbones. Hannibal's own hands curl into his hair, and tug at his

collar. The blanket of ash inside has sparked back to life, a fire that no longer scorches through his veins trailing destruction, but instead rages on leaving his insides warm but unharmed. He isn't used to feeling like this. It's always been the freezing waters of his brain against the oxygen filled fire burning his body. He'd been sure they would destroy each other, with him caught in the middle, sooner rather than later. This kiss feels like balance. It feels like an anchor, grounding in its realness. He knows he's here, not hallucinating, as his teeth scrape Hannibal's lips and he tastes blood.

Will pulls back, breathing heavily, a hand resting on Hannibal's cheek. He smirks as Hannibal leans forward unconsciously, chasing Will's lips, his eyes still closed. Will allows himself a moment to observe Hannibal like this, his tie crooked, his suit jacket wrinkled, and his hair disheveled. His breathing matches Will's own as they attempt to catch their breath. Will pulls his eyes up to meet Hannibal's as they open slowly and he speaks, "Do you feel something, Doctor?"

Hannibal smiles, "I can never quite predict you, can I?"

Will smirks and steps back from between Hannibal's legs, reaching for his almost empty whiskey glass, "I wouldn't want to bore you," he says and drains the whiskey in one gulp.

He doesn't miss the way Hannibal's eyes trace the column of his throat as he swallows, though they quickly find their way back to Will's face when he catches Will's pointed stare. "Remarkable boy; You are infinitely unknown and known to me, just as God is. I can never tire of you."

Will considers him for a second, scanning his face for any trace of manipulation. His eyes are sincere, open. He decides to test his theory.

He blinks once and opens Hannibal's eyes. He sees himself standing in the middle of the room, empty whiskey glass in hand, top button of his shirt undone. Will can finally see the man behind the mask. He searches for Hannibal's intentions, as he would on a case. He feels understood. He feels insatiable hunger that has somehow almost been sated. He feels uncertain. It's not something Hannibal's used to.

He blinks and he's Will Graham again. And Hannibal's smile is smaller, a sad glint in his eyes. Will glances to the window. It doesn't seem any darker. He doesn't think he was gone for more than a moment. Which means Hannibal noticed his fleeting departure from himself and knows what it meant. He always does somehow. Even as he thinks it, Hannibal speaks, "Do you still distrust me, Will?"

Will snorts and sets down the empty glass again, turning to watch Buster snap at Winston for getting too close to his collected pile of blankets. "To be fair, you are a serial killer."

He glances back at Hannibal's face before averting his eyes. He's hurt by Will's callousness; it's clear on his face. The mask is down and he had not been able to pull it back up again before Will noticed.

Hannibal sighs and pushes himself off the desk, adjusting his tie. "You don't have to analyze me Will. You have always understood me."

Will blinks. He hears Hannibal's shuffling behind him. "But I've never seen you, really seen you."

The shuffling stops. "Haven't you?"

Will stares at the dogs, but he doesn't see them. He sees late night conversations, twitches of Hannibal's lips. He sees the concern in the corners of the doctor's eyes when Hannibal had thought him dead.

He sees the moment he realized he had been going to Hannibal's office for more than psychiatric help, more often than necessary. They'd been sharing a bottle of wine, more than three quarters gone. Will was tipsy and Hannibal was laughing. He was laughing… loudly, and smiling. Will had never heard him laugh before. Some broken piece inside of him had fallen into the fire then, never to return.

The knife in his head wobbles as he stands on the edge, looking over at the sea of crimson waves and memories.

He's not ready to jump. Not yet.

But he doesn't back away from the edge. "If you never tire of me, then you won't mind if I kiss you again," Will says, quietly. The forest seems to sense the predators in its midst for silence continues to reign. Not even the dogs stir.

Hannibal cocks his head, doing analysis of his own. Will's already crossing the room. His fingers catch on Hannibal's suit sleeve, hovering close enough to feel the heat emanating from the skin of Hannibal's wrist, blue eyes never leaving the man in front of him. Hannibal nods lightly, barely noticeable. But Will notices. And he leans in, one hand coming up to Hannibal's hair. It's soft and thin between his fingers. He stops short of kissing him. He hovers there, in that space between seconds. And then he whispers against Hannibal's lips, "But not tonight."

Hannibal blinks in surprise as Will pulls away, tugging lightly on his sleeve as he takes a step backwards. He doesn't protest though as Will leads them to the door and opens it, blasting them both with the rush of frozen air that accompanies nights in Virginia.

Hannibal steps outside. Will feels the space like a great divide. He craves Hannibal's warmth like his body craves air. But he knows he needs time, space, to figure some things out. He tries to convey that to Hannibal as he smiles gently. "Sorry about dinner," he whispers into the night apologetically.

Hannibal seems to understand and he smiles back. It's almost tender. "Well worth it, my dear Will." And then he turns and takes the steps down the porch and crosses to his car. Will wants to freeze this moment as he watches Hannibal adjust his collar and tie as he walks. He doesn't fix his hair. It's still disheveled when he slides into his car and pulls out of the drive.

Will stands there, a chill settling into his bones. He recalls something from one of his science classes: cold is only the absence of warmth. It's never felt more true as he watches Hannibal disappear down the road taking his warmth with him.

Chapter End Notes

I have only a vague idea of a plot for the future of this fic so please, please if you'd like this to continue and you have any ideas please comment them. I make no promises but maybe they'll give me some ideas. Anyways, thank you for reading!

End Notes

If you guys liked it leave a comment. They make my day! I may write more of these two so if you guys have ideas for other fics comment or send me an ask on my main tumblr here or just yell about gay cannibals and other fandom stuff with me. I also have another tumblr here for all my writing stuff and another one specifically for Hannibal here

This was just a random idea so if you guys like it and want it to continue with an actual plot just lmk of any ideas you have and if I like it I may write it :)

Thanks for reading!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!